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Pre-emptive CIA Strikes Against Iran Predicted

By MAX McCARTHY

News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Pre-emptive strikes by the CIA against Iranian terrorist bases will become necessary this year when the character of the Iran-Iraq war changes, a former assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs said Wednesday.

Harold H. Saunders told a panel on "U.S. Interests in the Persian Gulf," it is the consensus of military experts that any Iranian offensive into Iraq will be blunted and Iran will turn to terrorist attacks this fall.

He predicted oil installations will be targets of the Iranian attacks. American, Saudi and Kuwaiti installations, as well facilities in the United Arab Emirates and other oil-rich Arab states, will have to be defended against the Iranians, he said.

Mr. Saunders, a policymaker in the Ford and Carter administrations, also said the CIA, with assistance from the U.S. armed forces, will have to be mobilized to attack the Iranian terrorist bases before sabotage moves against the oil facilities are launched.

Mr. Saunders, now a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, which sponsored the discussion, stressed that the CIA operations would not be new. He said, "We have always acted preemptively." He explained that the operations involve infiltration by CIA agents. "We have to have good enough intelligence," the former diplomat said.

"I don't know how many things like this (Iranian terrorist attacks) have been nipped in the bud" by such CIA operations, Mr. Saunders said.